



THOMAS L. GARTHWAITE, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

FRED LEAF
Chief Operating Officer

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
313 N. Figueroa, Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 240-8101

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Gloria Molina
First District

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
Second District

Zev Yaroslavsky
Third District

Don Knabe
Fourth District

Michael D. Antonovich
Fifth District

January 29, 2003

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: MRSA OUTBREAK AT THE SHERIFF'S DETENTION FACILITIES

The Acute Communicable Disease Control unit (ACDC) of the Department has been working with the Sheriff's Department in investigating and controlling an outbreak of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) skin infections in inmates at the Sheriff's detention facilities (jails). The specific type of MRSA identified in the jail has been recently identified as the type in other community MRSA outbreaks.

BACKGROUND

Staphylococcus aureus is a ubiquitous skin organism (approximately 30 – 50% of people carry it) and MRSA is a strain which has developed resistance to a number of families of antibiotics. It is often associated with outbreaks in hospitals and other healthcare settings (nosocomial). There have been increasing reports of MRSA skin infections outside of hospitals with distinct genotypes and resistance patterns, which may signify increased community transmission of MRSA.

OUTBREAK INVESTIGATION

In June 2002, ACDC was notified by the Sheriff's Department of an increase in MRSA skin infections in inmates. Subsequently, ACDC staff worked with Sheriff's staff to review all 2002 inmate MRSA cases. A total of 928 inmates had MRSA skin infections in 2002. Inmates from all Sheriff's facilities have been affected. Nine percent of the inmates had a MRSA culture within 5 days of booking date suggesting that the inmate had the infection before entering the jail. Fifty-seven persons were hospitalized in the first eight months.

CONTROL MEASURES

ACDC consulted with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop surveillance, treatment, and control guidelines for MRSA at the Sheriff's facilities. The Sheriff's Department is reviewing its policies and procedures on laundry, showers, environmental cleaning, skin care, and cohorting inmates.

Each Supervisor
January 29, 2003
Page 2

COMMUNITY IMPLICATIONS

Recently, PFGE ("molecular fingerprinting") results revealed that most MRSA isolates from the jails were a single type that had been seen in recent community outbreaks in the County. These included an ongoing investigation of MRSA among HIV+ men who have sex with men, and completed investigations of outbreaks in a football team and a newborn nursery. Because of this, our ongoing investigation of the jail outbreaks and investigation of community outbreaks must be coordinated. Isolates will be sent to CDC to see if this type is related to other national outbreaks of MRSA.

We will provide you with an update when additional information is available. In the meantime, please let us know if you have any questions or need additional information.

TLG:JEF:lm

c: Sheriff Leroy D. Baca
Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors